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*U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Patrick Dionne*

### **Student's Story Highlights Asian American, Pacific Islander Celebration**

*By MC2 Patrick Dionne*

The NPS Heritage Committee held its annual Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month celebration in Glasgow Hall, May 31, with NPS National Security Affairs student U.S. Navy Lt. Maria Veloria highlighting the event as guest speaker.

Under the theme, “Unite Our Mission by Engaging Each Other,” the commemoration included a series of presentations highlighting the many achievements of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders throughout the Armed Forces, along with a potluck of varied cuisines supplied by attendees and participants.

During her presentation, Veloria talked about her journey of immigrating to the United States at just 19 years old from Manila with her parents, her father a flag officer in the Philippine Army and her mother psychologist. Their goal was to give her and her siblings a better life.

“I vividly remember sitting at the airport with a one-way ticket to LAX thinking about the life I was leaving behind,” said Veloria. “Our first few months in California were difficult, money was tight and our family of eight had to share a single cramped two bedrooms, but despite this I was grateful for the opportunities that I did not have in the Philippines.”

One year later, Veloria would go on to enlist in the U.S. Navy as a storekeeper. Following her initial training and her first few deployments, she was selected to be a Nuclear Engineer Officer through the Seaman to Admiral program, and now is training to become a Foreign Area Officer.

“I will never lose sight of how blessed I am that my family was given the opportunity to come to America and prosper,” said Veloria. “In the meantime, I am proud of my Filipino heritage and the values and history that come with that as they are what make me who I am today. I am one of 16 million other Asian and Pacific Islanders in America, and we all have our own personal stories to tell.

“Some recollections are bittersweet, but most will boast of our proud accomplishments,” she continued. “From the laborers who connected our coasts 150 years ago, to the soldiers who fought overseas, to the innovators driving our nation’s growth, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders contribute to the diversity that makes the tapestry of America bright and beautiful.”

In addition to Veloria’s personal story, members of the committee took time to highlight the contributions of several Asian American and Pacific Islander service members including Marine Sgt. Jesse Aligana, who lost his life at the U.S. embassy in Nairobi, Kenya in 1998, and Rear Adm. Erh Chang, the first naturalized Asian American to become a flag officer.

“Events like these really help spread our culture and help each other learn through diversity while building a better community here at NPS,” said Heritage Committee Member Yeoman 2nd Class Cindy Argueta. “In a short time, we were able to bring everyone together for food and fun while learning about each other and building friendships.”

Asian American and Pacific Islander month was first signed into law by President Jimmy Carter on October 5, 1978 with the month of May chosen to correlate with the completion of the transcontinental railroad May 10, 1969.